



## Source 6

Extract from an article called 'Lions Led by Donkeys? The British Army in World War One' by Dr Gary Sheffield, 2002

(Courtesy of the BBC)

### How to use this source:

Study this source carefully and see what it tells you about views on the war at the time it was written. As you study the source, ask yourself:

- Would you say this source presents a balanced view?
- Which of sources 1-4 does it most agree with?
- Which of sources 1-4 does it most disagree with?
- Are there any areas in which source 6 agrees or disagrees with source 5?
- Will you choose this as one of the sources to use in your report?



## Source 6

Douglas Haig was 'brilliant to the top of his Army boots'. David Lloyd George's view sums up the attitude of many people towards Haig and other British generals of World War One. They were, supposedly, 'donkeys': moustachioed incompetents who sent the 'lions' of the Poor Bloody Infantry to their deaths in futile battles. Many popular books, films and television programmes echo this belief. The casualty list - one million British Empire dead - and the bloody stalemate of the Western Front seem to add credence to this version of events. But there is another interpretation. ...

One cannot ignore the appalling waste of human life in World War One. Some of these losses were undoubtedly caused by incompetence. Many more were the result of decisions made by men who, although not incompetent, were like any other human being prone to making mistakes. Haig's decision to continue with the fighting at Passchendaele in 1917 after the opportunity for real gains had passed comes into this category. In some ways the British and other armies might have grasped the potential of technology earlier than they did. During the Somme, Haig and Rawlinson failed to understand the best way of using artillery.

Haig, however, was no technophobe. He encouraged the development of advanced weaponry such as tanks, machine guns and aircraft. He, like Rawlinson and a host of other commanders at all levels in the BEF, learned from experience. The result was that by 1918 the British army was second to none in its modernity and military ability. It was led by men who, if not military geniuses, were at least thoroughly competent commanders. The victory in 1918 was the payoff. The 'lions led by donkeys' tag should be dismissed for what it is - a misleading caricature.

[To read the full article on the BBC website, go to:  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/lions\\_donkeys\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/lions_donkeys_01.shtml)]